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UNFPA – Evaluation

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Annual report on the evaluation function, 2017

Report of the Director, Evaluation Office

Summary

The present report provides information on the performance of the evaluation function at corporate and decentralized levels, as well as the contribution of UNFPA to the United Nations coherence in evaluation, including system-wide evaluations, and national evaluation capacity development. In addition, the report presents the 2018 programme of work and budget for the Evaluation Office.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to: (a) take note of the present report on the evaluation function of UNFPA, 2017, and of the programme of work and budget of the Evaluation Office in 2018; (b) welcome the efforts made by UNFPA and the significant progress achieved in strengthening the evaluation function, in actively contributing to United Nations system-wide evaluation efforts, and in fostering efforts for national evaluation capacity development; (c) reaffirm the role played by the evaluation function at UNFPA and underscore the importance of high-quality, independent evaluation evidence in the context of the new UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, and its contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; (d) request UNFPA to present a revised evaluation policy to the Executive Board at its first regular session 2019.

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"We need a culture of independent and real-time evaluation with full transparency."

– António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

I. Introduction

Working together to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

1. In the common chapter of their respective strategic plans for 2018-2021, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN-Women committed to working better together, characterized by stronger coherence and collaboration. The four entities welcomed the United Nations Secretary-General's report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and committed to step up joint efforts, with a sense of urgency, to better support countries to achieve sustainable development, including by working together more effectively at all levels, and by enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

2. The evaluation function at UNFPA, being fully aligned to the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021, is also fully committed to the above-mentioned principles, by enhancing coherence in the evaluation function in the United Nations system in the following four areas:

3. *Joint evaluations*. In the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2018-2021, UNFPA committed to manage three corporate evaluations jointly with UNICEF. In addition, the UNFPA Evaluation Office is fully committed to evaluating the common chapter of the strategic plans for 2018-2021 jointly with the evaluation offices of UNDP, UNICEF and UN-Women, and is already working on this with the other evaluation offices.

4. *System-wide evaluation*. Recognizing the strategic importance of evaluating the United Nations system response to humanitarian crises, UNFPA is committed, as indicated in the quadrennial evaluation plan, to co-lead two system-wide evaluations within the framework of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Group (IAHE). In addition, UNFPA also contributed, in 2016-2017, to the two pilot system-wide evaluative exercises led by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU).

5. *Enhancing coherence of evaluation functions* among different entities in the United Nations system, through actively supporting the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and IAHE.

6. *Joining forces with other United Nations entities in multi-stakeholders partnerships for strengthening national capacities to evaluate localized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),* with a special focus on 'no one left behind'. UNFPA continues to be an active member of EvalPartners, the global multi-stakeholders partnership for national evaluation capacities, co-led by UNEG and the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), as well as Evalgender+, co-led by UN-Women. In addition, UNFPA initiated in 2017 a partnership with EvalYouth, an EvalPartners' global movement to strengthen capacities of young evaluators.

II. UNFPA evaluation function

A. Aligning the evaluation function to the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021

7. The UNFPA evaluation function serves three main purposes: (a) demonstrate accountability to stakeholders on performance achieved; (b) support evidence-based decision-

making; and (c) contribute important lessons learned to the knowledge base of the organization. As foreseen by the policy,[1] UNFPA undertook a review of the UNFPA evaluation function during 2017-2018, focusing on reviewing the evaluation function against UNEG norms and standards. Key highlights of the review, including findings and recommendations, are presented in this report.

8. With the aim of re-aligning the evaluation function to the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021, the Evaluation Office produced a number of strategic documents in 2017. The quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2018-2021, adopted by the Executive Board at its first regular session 2018, guides the commissioning, management and use of evaluations, providing the basis for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of corporate and decentralized programme-level evaluations.

9. In 2017, the Evaluation Office developed the evaluation strategy, 2018-2021,[2] to support UNFPA in strengthening its performance and accountability as well as its contribution to the achievements of the SDGs. Framed by the UNFPA strategic plan and the broader set of directions adopted by the United Nations system, the evaluation strategy provides a clear direction for the UNFPA evaluation function, setting priorities to strengthen evaluation operations.

10. The evaluation strategy is complemented by an action plan for evaluation capacity development during 2018-2021, which presents systemic and practical initiatives for implementation in the next four years to strengthen the evaluation function at UNFPA.

B. Key highlights of the external independent strategic review of UNFPA evaluation function

11. The purpose of the review of the evaluation function was to (a) assess if the evaluation policy should be revised or not – and, if so, identify areas of the policy that should be revised; and (b) provide an independent assessment of the evaluation function in UNFPA against the UNEG norms and standards of independence, credibility and utility.

12. To ensure independence of the review process and content, a steering committee to oversee the review – including selection of an independent external consultant to carry out the review, as well as approval of the review report – was set up. The steering committee was chaired by the UNEG co-chair of the task force on review of evaluation functions, and composed of a representative from the evaluation office of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UNFPA Office of the Executive Director. To ensure a geographical and institutional diversity of perspectives, an external technical advisory panel was also established. Chaired by the former UNEG vice chair and Director of the UNICEF Evaluation Office, the advisory panel included the Deputy Executive Director, National Council for Evaluation of Public Policies, Coneval, Mexico; the Director General, Independent Evaluation Group; the Vice-President, The World Bank; the Governing Board Secretary, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association; and the President, African Evaluation Association.

13. The review found a consensus in UNFPA leadership at central and decentralized levels:[3] (a) an independent evaluation function is critical to the sound functioning of the organization and key to the successful realization of the UNFPA mission; and (b) evaluation is indispensable for sound management and policy decision-making, for independent accountability reporting and for generation of evidence-informed knowledge. These findings reflect, within UNFPA, a broad-based understanding of, and agreement on, the role and value not only of evaluation, but

1 The UNFPA evaluation policy (DP/FPA/2013/5) stipulates: "UNFPA will review the evaluation policy at regular intervals and revise it as needed. As part of the revision process, UNFPA may request, in 2016, a peer review of its evaluation system."
2 The evaluation strategy 2018-2021 is available on the Evaluation Office website.
3 The full report of the independent external review of UNFPA evaluation function is available in the Evaluation Office website.

as well of the necessary independence of the evaluation function. This consensus constitutes a strong foundation for evaluation in UNFPA – and, as such, should be consolidated, cared for and built on. This is a shared responsibility across the organization, at governance and management levels, and in countries, regions and headquarters.

14. The review found that the UNFPA evaluation policy is fundamentally sound. However, it considers the current UNFPA evaluation policy requires updating for it to be consistent with developments and changes both within UNFPA and in the broader United Nations and global contexts; the evaluation policy is amenable to adjustments that would better reflect the priorities of UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021. Finally, a revised evaluation policy should allow for, and support, change and innovation in UNFPA evaluation practices.

15. The review did not find evidence of or suggestions to the effect that there are threats to organizational independence. In terms of behavioural independence, the review considers the independence of external evaluators to be appropriately safeguarded. Quality assurance mechanisms for the decentralized evaluation function contribute to safeguarding independence for regional and country programme evaluations managed by decentralized business units. With respect to the governance and organization of the UNFPA evaluation function, the review is of the opinion that the structure and processes in place for accountability to the Executive Board as well as for the relationships between the Evaluation Office and UNFPA management are functioning well. However, the review considers that improvements could be made: to the quality of Evaluation Office reporting to the Board as well as its relationships with UNFPA management and with regional and country monitoring and evaluation staff.

16. The review considers that, largely, corporate and decentralized evaluation processes are transparent and inclusive – the two dimensions highlighted in UNEG norms and standards as being key to the credibility of evaluation. The review also found that UNFPA guidance recognizes that other important norms contribute to the credibility of evaluations, such as the ethical conduct of evaluation teams, which are impartial and demonstrate appropriate professional and cultural competencies. While the review did not seek to assess the consistency of evaluation practice in UNFPA with these norms, in its extensive round of interviews and meetings, it did not come across indications to the contrary. Finally, the review found that the UNFPA quality assurance system for evaluations contributes to the credibility of both corporate and decentralized evaluations.

17. In terms of performance, the review found that – within the parameters set by the evaluation policy and the UNFPA financial and administrative framework – the evaluation function has progressed relative to the objectives it has set for itself, and done so with reasonable regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The review also found that the evaluation function generally reports on its work in a manner consistent with UNEG norms and standards. In the context of an independent and distinct evaluation function, developed from the ground up some five years ago, the performance of the current systems can be considered a reasonable and commendable achievement.

18. The review considered the UNFPA evaluation function to be managed with due regard for utility. However, the review highlighted the importance for UNFPA of adapting continuously its evaluation processes to best support the attainment of the UNFPA mission in rapidly changing and challenging contexts. In particular, there should be a focus on strengthening communication effectiveness, including the effectiveness of written reports relative to their intended readerships.

19. Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, the review recommended the following:

(a) The evaluation policy should be updated for consistency with developments and changes both within UNFPA and in the broader United Nations and global contexts;

(b) Presentations of results and recommendations from evaluations to the Executive Board should be mindful of its governance function and its requirements. This means, among other considerations, not delving into technical and methodological information beyond what is necessary to provide the Board with information relevant to its strategic, policy and programming interests;

(c) The Evaluation Office should guide the evaluation function in UNFPA towards a better balance between accountability, decision support and learning purposes. UNFPA adapts continuously its evaluation approaches and processes to best inform and support the attainment of the UNFPA mission in rapidly changing and challenging contexts

(d) The Evaluation Office should better integrate relevant developments in the theory and practice of evaluation. The conception of evaluation quality should be based on a more comprehensive and value-based understanding of quality;

(e) The Evaluation Office, in its role as custodian of the evaluation function in UNFPA, together with relevant stakeholders, should progressively address the nature and organization of the decentralized evaluation function;

(f) The Evaluation Office should systematically address the review's observations to further improve the methodology, findings and analysis, conclusions and the communication of evaluation reports;

(g) The Evaluation Office should progressively update its evaluation quality assurance and assessment system

20. In the management response,[4] UNFPA welcomed the external independent strategic review of the UNFPA evaluation function. Management acknowledged that this review was a key learning exercise, and would contribute to ensuring that UNFPA is able to effectively demonstrate its contribution to development results within its mandate. The consultative process of the review made it a valuable learning opportunity in itself, which led to the real-time assimilation of its findings and conclusions, including allowing real-time implementation of some recommendations. UNFPA accepted all recommendations and is committed to their timely implementation.

C. Performance of the evaluation function

21. With the aim of strengthening transparency and clarity in the reporting of the performance of the evaluation function, the Evaluation Office this year developed a set of key performance indicators. Applied retroactively, the system allows reporting on the performance of the evaluation function over the last strategic plan (2014-2017) and beyond, as shown below.

Table 1
Trends in key performance indicators, 2013-2017

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Overall assessment
Key performance indicator	***Description***						
1. Financial resources invested in evaluation function*	*Budget for evaluation as a percentage of total UNFPA programme budget*	-	*0.45*	*0.69*	*0.91*	*0.83*	Overall positive trend, but far from reaching target of 3%

4 The full management response to the independent external review of UNFPA evaluation function is available in the Evaluation Office website.

2. Human resources for monitoring and evaluation	*Percentage of country offices staffed with a monitoring and evaluation focal point or officer*	*100*	*100*	*95.9*	*99.2*	*96.7*	Overall stable trend, closed to totality of COs with M&E staff
3. Evaluation Coverage**	*Percentage of country offices that have conducted a country programme evaluation once every two cycles*	-	-	-	-	*80.0*	Improvement needed
4. Evaluation implementation rate***	*Percentage of planned evaluations being implemented*	-	-	-	*60.0*	*55.0*	Improvement needed
5. Quality of evaluations	*Percentage of evaluations rated "good" and above*	-	*50.0*	*77.0*	*92.0*	*95.0*	Positive trend
6. Evaluation reports posted on evaluation database	*Percentage of completed evaluation reports posted on evaluation database*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	Achieved
7. Management response submission	*Percentage of completed evaluation reports submitted with management response*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	Achieved
8. Implementation of management response	*Percentage of management response actions completed*	*61.0*	*76.5*	*78.0*	*78.5*	*84.4*	Positive trend

Source: Evaluation database. Abbreviations: COs: country offices; M&E: monitoring and evaluation

*See paragraph 24 for important methodological explanation.

** Captures an eight-year period (2011-2018) of completed, ongoing and planned evaluations. Going forward, the key performance indicator table will report on subsequent 8-year periods (i.e. 2012-2019 in the 2018 annual report). The first year for which this data is reported is 2017.

*** Prior to 2016, the Evaluation Office was not collecting data on implementation at the level of granularity reflected in the present report.

22. Since the revision of the evaluation policy in 2013, important progress has been made on the majority of key performance indicators. Considerable progress has been made in the *quality of evaluation reports* – with 95 per cent (21 evaluations out of 22) assessed as "good" or "very good" in 2017, as compared to 50 per cent (six evaluations out of 12) in 2014 – and in the *financial resources for evaluation* – which almost doubled, from 0.45 per cent in 2014 to 0.83 per cent in 2017. The submission of management responses reached 100 per cent, while the annual implementation of evaluation recommendations has reached 84 per cent (up from 61 per cent in 2013).

23. The slight decline in human resources for monitoring and evaluation – down from 99.2 per cent in 2016 to 96.7 percent in 2017 – is due to staff movements in three country offices, with the posts expected to be filled in 2018. Although progress has been made in most indicators, there is need for further improvement in financial resource investments in the evaluation function and in the coverage and implementation of decentralized programme-level evaluations.

Key performance indicator 1: financial resources

24. While the methodology used to calculate investment in the evaluation function was consistent through 2016, an updated approach to ensure full alignment with the evaluation policy –stating, "up to 3 per cent of the total programme budget will be allocated for the evaluation function" – was adopted in 2017. The new approach uses "UNFPA programme budget expenditures" instead of "UNFPA total expenditure" to estimate the proportion of financial resources invested in evaluation.

25. Overall, the amount budgeted in 2017 for the evaluation function was $6.30 million, with $3.36 million budgeted at the corporate level (the Evaluation Office) and $2.94 million budgeted at the decentralized level (see table 2). This represents 0.83 per cent of the total UNFPA programme expenditure for 2017. The budget invested in evaluation constantly increased at corporate and decentralized levels year-on-year from 2014 to 2018 – with the exception of 2017. From 2014 to 2018, the budget spent in evaluation doubled, from $3.69 million to $7.61 million.

Table 2
Budget invested in the evaluation function, 2014-2018 (millions of $)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure**	**820.2**	**798.6**	**763.5**	**752.9**	-
Total budget of the evaluation function	**3.69**	**5.52**	**6.94**	**6.30**	**7.61**
Evaluation Office	2.38	2.63	3.71	3.36	4.38
Decentralized evaluation function	1.31***	2.89	3.23	2.94	3.23
Total budget of the evaluation function as percentage of UNFPA programme budget expenditures	*0.45%*	*0.69%*	*0.91%*	*0.83%*	-

Source: "Total UNFPA programme budget expenditure", generated from the UNFPA Statistical and Financial Reviews for 2014-2017. The Evaluation Office budget is derived from the UNFPA financial system (Cognos), while the budget for the decentralized function includes the budget for decentralized programme-level evaluations (self-reported) and decentralized staffing costs (generated through a survey conducted by the Evaluation Office in 2016).

* Data on total 2018 UNFPA programme budget expenditure will be available in 2019.

** See methodological note in paragraph 24.

*** Decentralized staffing costs are not available for 2014; the figure ($1.31 million) therefore reflects only the budget for evaluations.

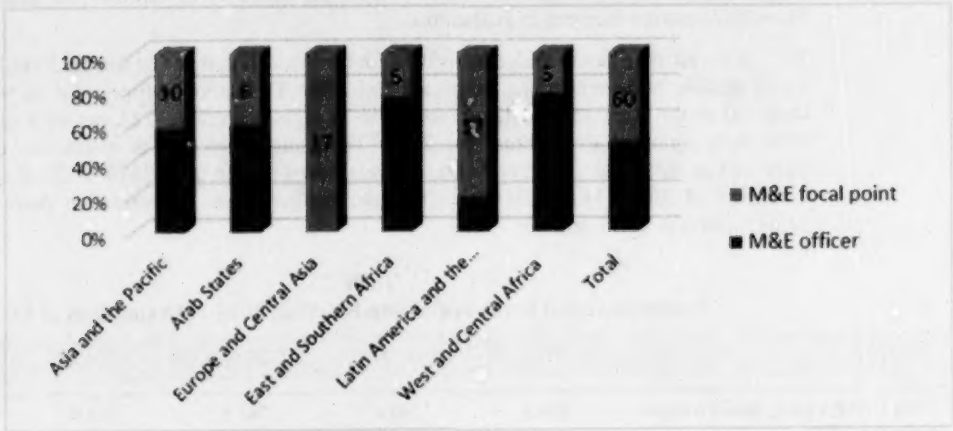
Key performance indicator 2: human resources

26. As of December 2017, the Evaluation Office had eight approved posts: one at general service level, six at professional level and one at director level. The Office in 2017 recruited an evaluation analyst and a communications and knowledge management specialist, who joined in February 2018; the former will provide support to corporate evaluations while the latter will focus on strengthening its capabilities in communication and knowledge management systems. In addition to the posts, the Evaluation Office benefited from a secondment (Sweden) and a junior professional officer (Switzerland) focused on evaluation capacity development.

27. At the decentralized regional level, the staffing profile remained the same as in previous years: UNFPA has six regional monitoring and evaluation advisors; all posts were filled. Some 96.7 per cent of country offices were staffed with either a monitoring and evaluation officer (47 per cent of country offices) or a monitoring and evaluation focal point (49.5 per cent of

country offices). The distribution shows that offices with a larger programme of work tend to have a dedicated monitoring and evaluation officer while monitoring and evaluation focal points are largely concentrated in country offices with a relatively smaller portfolio.

Figure 1
Human resources for monitoring and evaluation, 2017, by region



Source: Evaluation Office

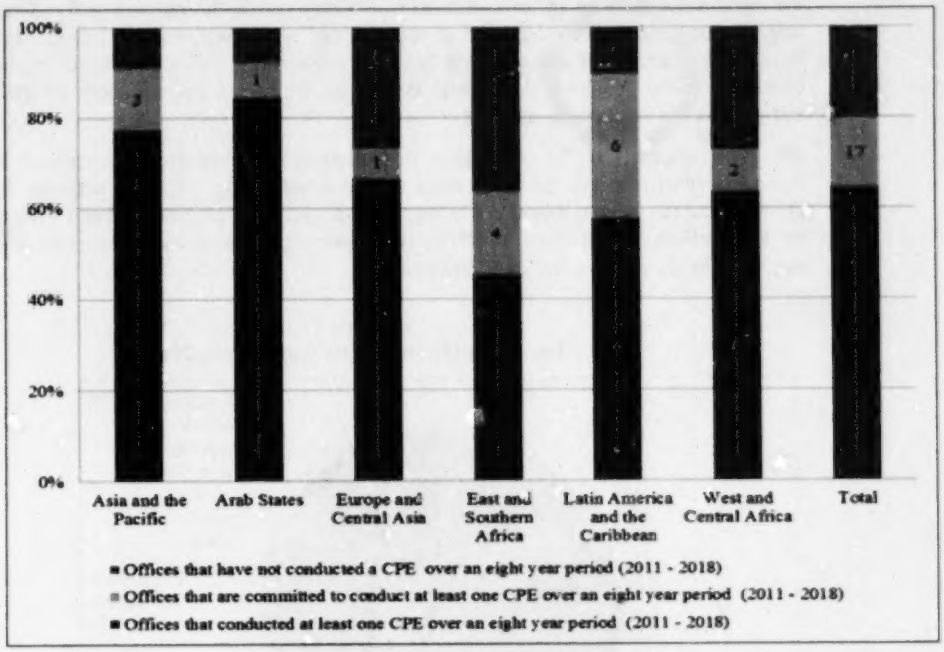
Abbreviation: M&E: monitoring and evaluation

Key performance indicator 3: coverage of decentralized evaluations

28. The evaluation policy states that country offices should manage a country programme evaluation at least once every two cycles. Previously, compliance to this commitment was not monitored. To address this gap, the Evaluation Office developed the new indicator "percentage of country offices that have conducted at least one country programme evaluation over the last eight-year period".

29. Currently, 90 country offices (80 per cent) have completed, or are scheduled to complete, at least one country programme evaluation over the last eight years, while 23 offices (20 per cent) have not conducted any evaluation during 2011-2018. The Arab States (92 per cent coverage) and Asia and Pacific (91 per cent coverage) are the regions with the highest level of coverage. Security concerns, humanitarian situations and limited capacity to manage evaluations in smaller country offices with fewer staff and lower levels of funding have eroded full coverage. Conversely, buy-in and commitment of country representatives and the presence of a trained monitoring and evaluation officer in the country office are principal factors for an increase in demand for evaluations.

Figure 2
Evaluation coverage by region, 2011-2018 (*)



Source: UNFPA evaluation database and UNFPA regional monitoring and evaluation advisors

(*) *Note*: programme cycles at UNFPA vary in duration, and these can be extended. Methodologically, the Evaluation Office assumed four years as the average length of a country programme. However, it is not unusual for cycles to be extended. Hence, a country that has not conducted a country programme evaluation over a period of eight years can abide by the evaluation policy in the event that the programme cycle is of a longer duration than four years.

Key performance indicator 4: implementation rate of planned evaluations

30. In previous years, the annual report captured the implementation rate of decentralized programme-level evaluations separately from that of corporate evaluations. To align with the evaluation indicator in the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021 – which tracks the percentage of corporate and decentralized evaluations completed as planned – the Evaluation Office will now report on the total implementation rate, that is, the aggregate of decentralized programme-level evaluations and corporate evaluations.

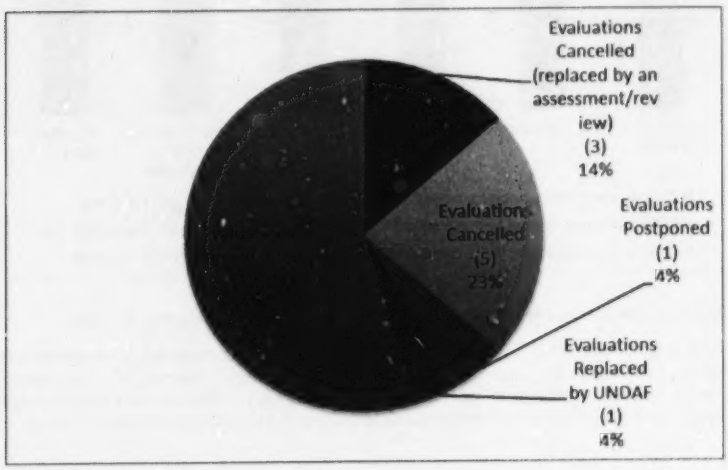
31. Overall, the implementation of planned evaluations should be strengthened. In 2017, 55 per cent (12 of 22 evaluations) were implemented, a slight decrease, compared to 2016 (where 25 of 42 evaluations, or 60 per cent, were implemented). All but one of the cancellations occurred at the decentralized programme level, with a significant proportion at regional levels.

32. However, a number of cancellations or postponements have valid programmatic reasons. For example, one country programme evaluation (4 per cent) was replaced with an evaluation on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (Rwanda), while another was postponed to accommodate an extension in the country programme (Mexico). Additionally, one country programme evaluation, originally planned for 2019, was conducted earlier at the request of the Government (Malawi) and another (Philippines), originally planned for 2016, was postponed to 2017.

33. Of the 36 per cent (or eight of 22 evaluations) cancelled without a valid programmatic reason, the primary causes was financial and human resources constraints. However, three of the eight were replaced by an assessment or survey, while the remaining five were not. The majority of cancellations occurred at the regional level. While cancellations are, at times, beyond the control of country and regional offices, greater attention to implementation continues to be required. Additional details on cancelled decentralized programme-level evaluations are available in annex 2.

34. To enhance UNFPA capabilities in implementing scheduled decentralized evaluations in an effective manner, the Evaluation Office is exploring, together with the Programme Division and the Human Resources Division, strategies to secure financial and human resources for field offices. The Evaluation Office will report in its next annual report (in 2019) on the outcomes of the above-mentioned strategies.

Figure 3
Implementation rate of evaluations, 2017

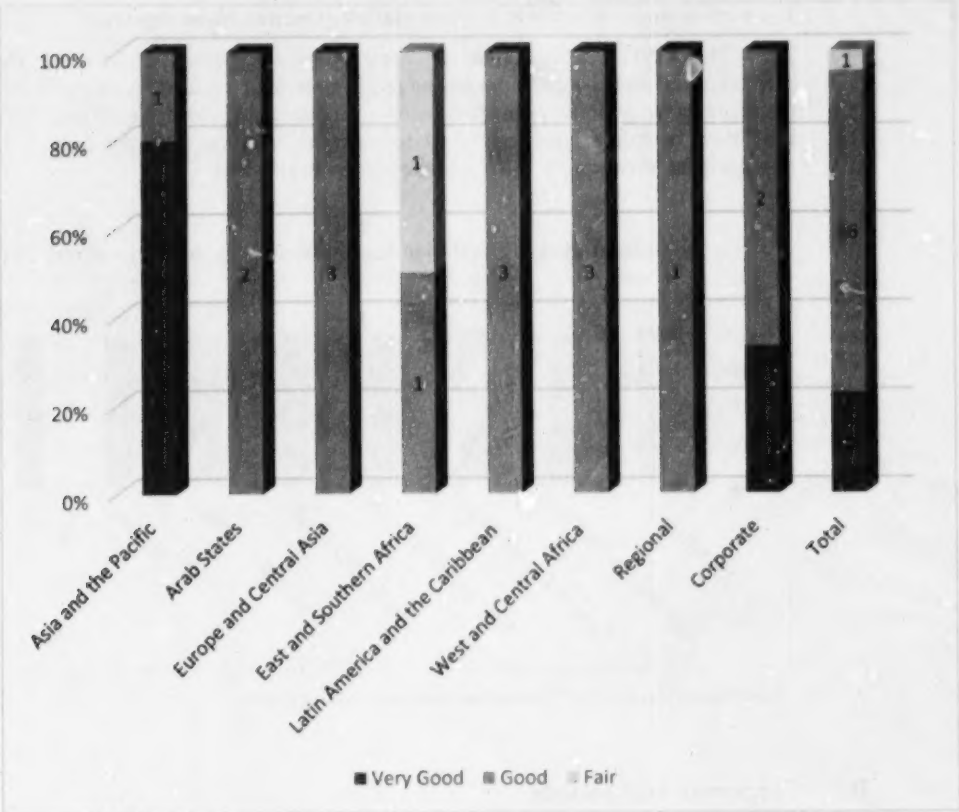

Evaluations Cancelled (replaced by an assessment/review) (3) 14%
Evaluations Postponed (1) 4%
Evaluations Cancelled (5) 23%
Evaluations Replaced by UNDAF (1) 4%

Source: Evaluation Office

Key performance indicator 5: quality of evaluation reports

35. The average quality of evaluations has risen year-on-year, with the proportion of reports assessed as 'good' and 'very good' increasing, from 50 per cent in 2014 to 95 per cent in 2017. Continuing the trend from the previous year, there were no reports rated as 'unsatisfactory', suggesting that the quality assurance mechanisms put in place are sustaining a performance floor in successfully strengthening the quality of evaluations.

Figure 4
Quality of evaluations, by region, 2017



Source: Quality assessment conducted by an external consulting firm (managed by UNFPA Evaluation Office)

Key performance indicator 6: submission rate of completed evaluation reports posted on the UNFPA evaluation database

36. In 2017, all completed evaluations, at both decentralized and corporate levels, were posted on the evaluation database; these are publicly available. Corporate evaluations, besides being presented to the Executive Board, are posted on the Evaluation Office website; their release is the subject of a communication message sent to all UNFPA staff and the wider evaluation community (including UNEG members).

Key performance indicator 7: evaluations with management responses

37. In December 2016, the Programme Division launched a new management response tracking system: TeamCentral. It enables automated notifications, helps generate periodic status reports, and brings about greater clarity in roles and responsibilities, improving the quality and timeliness of responses to recommendations and, ultimately, the use of evaluations. In mid-2017, the Programme Division issued guidance on the development, reporting and tracking of management responses.

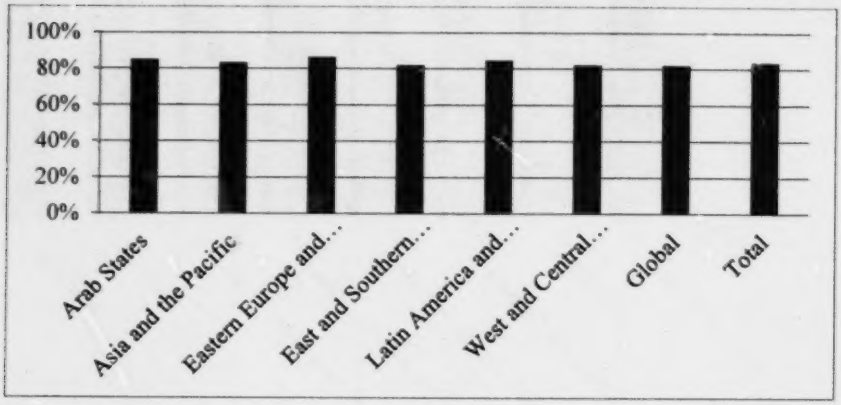
38. All 22 evaluations (corporate, regional and country programme) completed and quality-assessed in 2017 had a management response, as required by UNFPA evaluation policy.

Key performance indicator 8: implementation of management responses

39. The UNFPA Programme Division monitors evaluation use and follow-up of recommendations for both corporate and programme-level evaluations. In 2017, the percentage of 'accepted programme evaluation recommendations for which the actions due in the year have been completed' has continued to improve, reaching 84.5 per cent, a 5.5 per-cent improvement, compared to 2016, and the highest in six years.

Figure 5

Implementation of evaluation management response/key actions, 2016



Source: TeamCentral – UNFPA management response tracking system

D. Corporate evaluations

40. In 2017, the Evaluation Office continued its ongoing efforts to ensure quality and timely delivery of corporate evaluations, following the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2016-2019 (DP/FPA/2015/12). The Office presented to the Executive Board the findings of the corporate evaluations of: (a) the architecture supporting the operationalization of the UNFPA strategic plan (2014-2017); and (b) the UNFPA innovation initiative.

41. By December 2017, the implementation rate for corporate evaluations during 2017-2018 (either on track or completed) was 93 per cent: 13 of 14 evaluations were completed or on track to be completed as planned, while one was cancelled.

42. In 2017, corporate evaluations experienced long procurement processes. To reduce the duration of procurement processes, and enhance cost-effectiveness, the Evaluation Office started to establish long-term agreements covering corporate thematic evaluations approved in the quadrennial budgeted evaluation pian, 2018-2021.

Table 3
Implementation status of planned corporate evaluations and other evaluative studies, 2017-2018

Title	Status	Management response	Presentation to Executive Board/ steering committee
1. End-line evaluation of H4+ Joint Programme Canada and Sweden (Sida), 2011-2016	Completed	Yes	Informal joint meeting of UNFPA/UNICEF executive boards during first regular session 2018
2. Evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalization of the UNFPA strategic plan (2014-2017)	Completed	Yes	Informal meeting during second regular session 2017
3. Formative evaluation of the UNFPA Innovation Initiative	Completed	Yes	First regular session 2018
4. Meta synthesis of lessons learned from UNFPA country programme evaluations, 2014-2015	Completed	Not applicable	Presented in framework of 2016 annual report of the evaluation function at annual session 2017
5. Evaluability assessment of UNFPA-UNICEF global programme to accelerate action to end child marriage	Completed	Yes	Presented at the steering committee of the UNFPA/UNICEF joint programme on child marriage
6. Evaluation of UNFPA support to comprehensive sexuality education programmes	Cancelled, as this item will be addressed in a forthcoming evaluation on gender equality and women's empowerment	Not applicable	Not applicable
7. Meta-analysis of the engagement of UNFPA in highly vulnerable contexts	Completed	Not applicable	To be presented within the framework of the 2017 annual report of the evaluation function at the annual session 2018
8. Midterm evaluation of the UNFPA supplies programme	On track		
9. Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis	On track		
10. Evaluation of UNFPA support to the prevention, response to and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices, including in humanitarian settings	On track		
11. Evaluation of results-based management approaches	On track		
12. Joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change (Phase I + II)	On track		
13. Evaluation of the UNFPA capacity to respond to humanitarian crisis	On track		
14. System-wide inter-agency humanitarian evaluation of United Nations system response in Yemen	On track		

E. Use of corporate evaluations to foster change

43. In order to report not only on the *normative quality* of the evaluation function – its compliance to UNEG norms and standards and to key performance indicators – but also on its *functional quality* – the value addition of the evaluation function – the Evaluation Office has started to report to the Executive Board, from this year onwards, not only the implementation rate of management responses of evaluations, but also the changes (or lack of changes) in UNFPA policies, strategies and practices to which corporate evaluations have contributed. This year, the Evaluation Office is reporting on the two corporate evaluations below.

Evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalization of the UNFPA strategic plan (2014-2017)

44. The main purpose of the evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalization of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2014-2017 was to inform the design of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021. Through regular interactions between the evaluation team and the UNFPA strategic plan development team, useful and timely information was provided throughout the evaluation process, ahead of the finalization of the evaluation report.

45. In response to the evaluation recommendation to revise the business model with regard to the modes of engagement approach, the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021, clarifies that, with the exception of service delivery (which will be reserved for countries in the red quadrant and countries in humanitarian settings), all modes of engagement will now be made available to country offices regardless of their classification. The recommendation to develop and implement a comprehensive change management process has led to the establishment of an interdivisional working group, headed by the Deputy Executive Director for Management. The working group was tasked with the development and implementation of a change management plan for the entire organization as well as related communication products. Tasks currently carried out within the framework of the change management process include a comprehensive resources review and the development of an information and communication technologies plan.

Evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014)

46. The evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation (2005-2014) provided the foundation for the UNFPA 2020 census strategy. Specifically, in accordance with the recommendations, UNFPA built its strategy around seven key pillars: (a) streamlining the internal organizational structure; (b) rolling out structured census technical guidance; (c) promoting integration of high-resolution geographic information systems in censuses; (d) strengthening capacity for greater utilization of census data; (e) promoting new and innovative census technologies and methodologies to estimate and generate population data for development; (f) leveraging institutional partnerships at all levels; and (g) strengthening resource mobilization.

47. Following an evaluation recommendation, UNFPA has undertaken an assessment of in-house census expertise, and is designing a capacity development strategy to address existing gaps. Corporate guidelines on the qualifications needed by UNFPA staff to support a census effectively are being developed. In 2017, UNFPA invested in regional workshops to strengthen capacity on census. To ensure that capacity development and technical support meet a country's needs, UNFPA plans to establish a census roster for a rapid deployment to provide technical support to countries (this is also a recommendation of the evaluation). In addition, UNFPA reduced duplication of efforts through an improved coordination of technical support to countries with the United Nations Statistical Division and the United States Census Bureau under a newly established International Committee on Census Coordination. A UNFPA inter-divisional working group (led by the Population and Development Branch) started rolling out structured census technical guidance tools for multi-year planning purposes, to guide UNFPA country offices in supporting national statistical offices. Other upcoming guidance will relate

to resource mobilization, user consultation, political risk assessment, census technology, field management and post-enumeration surveys.

F. Decentralized evaluation system

48. Reflecting the decentralized nature of UNFPA, 73 per cent of all evaluations were managed by field offices (both country and regional offices), with the remainder managed at corporate level by the Evaluation Office. This ensures a right balance between corporate evaluations that inform global policies, strategies and initiatives, and decentralized evaluations managed by field offices that generate country-specific evidence relevant to UNFPA country programmes.

49. However, this also underscores the importance of ensuring the delivery of planned decentralized programme-level evaluations that continue to meet high quality standards. Resource constraints, affecting overall coverage and implementation, continue to be a significant challenge. To address this, the Evaluation Office, the Programme Division and the regional offices are working together to address the underlying drivers of budget challenges and to ensure the continued credibility, quality and use of decentralized evaluations.

Systems to improve the quality, credibility and use of decentralized evaluations

50. To ensure proper evaluation planning, country and regional costed evaluation plans continued to be reviewed by the Programme Review Committee at UNFPA headquarters. To enhance proper implementation, the Evaluation Office deepened its collaboration with the Programme Division. For instance, the Programme Division and the Evaluation Office jointly analysed implementation rates in 2016 and 2017 to identify bottlenecks. This led to a joint communication to regional and country offices highlighting the importance of implementing planned evaluations in 2018 and the necessity for timely backstopping services, should challenges arise.

51. The identification of evaluation consultants with the required experience has remained a challenge. To address this, the Evaluation Office in 2017 enhanced the user-friendliness of the global consultancy roster by organizing the vetted consultants by key search items. In addition, the Evaluation Office continued to assess consultants, bringing the number of vetted evaluation consultants to 32 (out of over 1,000 applications received).

52. The evaluation quality assessment system continued to be used as a key instrument to assure the quality and credibility of decentralized and corporate evaluations. This contributed to achieving 95 per cent of reports rated as 'good' and above.

Internal evaluation capacity development

53. To ensure a systemic and corporate approach to evaluation capacity development, the Evaluation Office in 2017 led an interdivisional working group to develop a related action plan for 2018-2021. Meanwhile, the Evaluation Office and regional monitoring and evaluation advisers continued to contribute, throughout 2017, to a wide variety of workshops and trainings aimed at strengthening evaluation capacity.

54. Both the Asia and Pacific Regional Office (APRO) and the East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) organized training workshops for monitoring and evaluation staff and other country-level staff, developing their capacity on results-based management, planning, monitoring and evaluation and communication of evaluation results. The West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) organized two results-based management workshops, one for francophone country offices and another for anglophone country offices. The Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO) created, jointly with the Evaluation Office, a "learning hour" focused on evaluation and on 'leaving no one behind'.

55. Innovative approaches to enhance knowledge sharing were also implemented. EECARO provided off-site technical assistance to build capacity of country office monitoring and evaluation focal points, strengthening collaboration between the regional office and the country offices. APRO organized a peer-to-peer learning exercise, in which country offices that completed country programme evaluations in 2016 shared their experiences with country offices initiating evaluations in 2017.

G. Meta-analysis of the engagement of UNFPA in highly vulnerable contexts

56. In order to leverage the wealth of evidence provided by decentralized evaluations, the Evaluation Office in 2017 conducted a meta-analysis aimed at generating learning on UNFPA engagement in countries at high risk of facing a humanitarian crisis as well as those emerging from humanitarian situations, such as natural disasters, epidemics and armed conflicts. Building on a synthesis of the results of six previously completed country programme evaluations, the meta-analysis gathered information on a wider circle of 25 UNFPA priority humanitarian countries through document reviews, semi-structured interviews and electronic surveys.

57. The meta-analysis concluded that a fair basis had been established for UNFPA to position itself strategically and programmatically within the humanitarian-development nexus, although it also noted the need for a corporate vision or policy. It suggested UNFPA should develop a strong corporate policy on working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It also suggested producing case studies on linking development and humanitarian approaches in the niche areas of UNFPA and to work towards more flexibility, to shift financial resources from emergency to development, and vice versa.

58. The report noted that while UNFPA has clearly emerged as a humanitarian agency, funding is not commensurate with population needs and corporate commitments. With the aim of enhancing the capability of country offices to adequately finance their emergency and response plans, including by leveraging additional other resources, the meta-analysis suggested using the midterm review of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021, to adapt the UNFPA resource allocation system, notably by: (a) introducing a funding floor; and (b) better reflecting fragility and risk in funds allocation criteria. A stronger focus on preparedness should also be placed in UNFPA country programmes to manage humanitarian needs.

59. The meta-analysis highlighted that UNFPA staff in highly vulnerable contexts are frequently stretched thin; this affects their well-being and performance as well as the reputation of UNFPA as a humanitarian actor. As a remedy, it suggested that office structuring be reviewed to meet strategic plan humanitarian requirements. It also suggested that adequate presence of dedicated humanitarian staff be ensured in UNFPA priority humanitarian countries.

60. Another key conclusion of the report was that UNFPA is at crossroads – whether to invest further in becoming a go-to agency for humanitarian data or to accept a more modest role. Key suggestions in this regard are to clarify expectations underlying 'increasing investment in data in emergencies', as per the UNFPA strategic plan, 2018-2021, to ensure the availability of adequate expert support for country offices in headquarters and regional offices, and to explore options for better using and integrating population and development officers in humanitarian programming.

III. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

61. As outlined in the introduction, the Evaluation Office is fully committed to enhancing coherence in the United Nations system's evaluation functions, including in the framework of United Nations reform. It does so engaging and collaborating with other United Nations entities, either bilaterally or system-widely, as presented below.

A. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)

62. The Evaluation Office has been co-leading the UNEG work on the professionalization of evaluation and on the decentralized evaluation function since 2015. After the working group on professionalization of evaluation launched six pilot projects in 2016 (to test the practical applicability of the newly developed evaluation competency framework), the first tentative lessons learned were identified and reported back to UNEG at its annual general meeting in March 2017. An evaluation competency leaflet and a related tool were subsequently developed and widely disseminated. As co-convener of the decentralized evaluation function interest group, the Evaluation Office has contributed to promoting and sharing good practices and learning across agencies, including through the exploratory study of the United Nations decentralized evaluation functions.

63. The Evaluation Office has contributed to the work of the UNEG working groups on gender and human rights, as well as humanitarian issues. In particular, the Evaluation Office contributed to the guidelines on evaluating corporate gender-equality policies; the development of an e-learning course on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluations; and the United Nations system-wide action plan on gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN-SWAP) evaluation performance indicator technical revision. The Evaluation Office also contributed to the development of a mapping and synthesis of humanitarian-development nexus evaluations as well as a draft guidance for evaluating humanitarian interventions, to be piloted in 2018.

64. The Evaluation Office actively participated in the UNEG evaluation week 2017, including by organizing, together with UNDP, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, a panel discussion on: "No one left behind: evaluating vulnerable and marginalized groups".

B. United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

65. On a yearly basis, the Evaluation Office reports on compliance of the UNFPA evaluation reports against the evaluation performance indicator for the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In 2017, on aggregate, UNFPA evaluation reports met the requirements of that indicator, with a score of 9.23. This reflects a continuous year on year improvement from 2015 (with a score of 8.87) and 2016 (with a score of 9.15) in the integration of gender equality principles in evaluation reports.

C. Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

66. In 2017, the Evaluation Office continued to take part in the work of the IAHE Steering Group. In response to an independent review in 2016, the Steering Group decided to improve IAHE performance by adopting four action points: (a) development of a conceptual framework; (b) development of a four-year rolling workplan; (c) development of an engagement and communications strategy; and (d) revision of the guidelines for inter-agency humanitarian evaluations. As part of its four-year workplan, the IAHE Steering Group is planning to launch a system-wide evaluation of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen in 2018. The Evaluation Office volunteered to co-lead this evaluation.

D. Independent system-wide evaluation mechanisms

67. The Evaluation Office is fully committed and engaged in supporting independent system-wide evaluation mechanisms, and will continue to do so in future. In 2016, the Evaluation Office supported in two independent system-wide evaluations, led by the Joint Inspection Unit. Both evaluations were part of a pilot to develop and test independent system-wide evaluation mechanism in the United Nations system. In 2017, through the UNEG, the Evaluation Office also supported the external review of the independent system-wide

evaluation mechanism, which recommended the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation unit. In addition, technical advice was also delivered, through the UNEG, to the United Nations Secretary-General's office in further developing the proposal to establish an independent system-wide evaluation unit presented in the Secretary-General's report: *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet.*

E. Joint evaluations

68. UNFPA supports joint evaluations with other United Nations organizations both at corporate and decentralized levels. At corporate level, UNFPA in 2017 managed, together with UNICEF, the joint scoping exercise for the joint evaluation of female genital mutilation, as well as the joint availability assessment of the joint programme on child marriage, in addition to the joint evaluation of the H4+ joint programme. At country level, in addition to supporting UNDAF evaluations, UNFPA also manages joint evaluations. For example, in 2017, UNFPA, together with UNICEF and WFP, managed the joint evaluation of the joint programme on girls' education in Malawi, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education of Malawi.

F. United Nations regional evaluation groups and UNDAF evaluations

69. UNFPA has actively supported all UNDAF evaluations managed by the United Nations system in 2017 – whether through technical and/or financial support. In the majority of cases, UNFPA is a member of the monitoring and evaluation task force of the United Nations country teams (UNCT). UNFPA is co-leading or actively contributing to United Nations regional evaluation groups, comprising the regional monitoring and evaluation advisors of different United Nations entities. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNFPA co-chairs (together with UNICEF) the interagency regional monitoring and evaluation task team of the Programme Support Group of the United Nations Development Group for the region, which systematically provides quality assurance and technical assistance to the UNDAF evaluation processes. In the Asia Pacific region, besides delivering joint training to UNCT members, UNFPA is an active member of the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and the Pacific, which supports UNDAF evaluations in that region.

IV. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

70. The Evaluation Office has been working to strengthen its engagement for national evaluation capacity development since 2016. It is member of key multi-stakeholders partnerships, including EvalPartners and EvalGender+. Given the specific mandate for youth, the Evaluation Office in late 2017 started a new partnership with EvalYouth – an EvalPartners' global movement of young evaluators that engages up to 20,000 youth all over the world. Within this framework, the Evaluation Office supported the second EvalYouth virtual conference, with 750 young evaluators from all over the world registered, and, together with ASRO and the Jordan country office, helped to organize a capacity-building workshop for young evaluators in the region, leading to the launch of the EvalYouth MENA chapter.

71. The Evaluation Office supported the regional evaluation conference organized by EvalMENA in Jordan, and delivered the keynote opening speech on "Evaluating humanitarian assistance and refugee response in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." About 200 participants from all over the region, including representatives of Governments, civil society organizations, academia, parliamentarians and young evaluators, attended the conference.

72. The Evaluation office and EECARO contributed to the international conference on strengthening national evaluations systems organized by UNDP. The Latin America and

Caribbean Regional Office worked closely with Governments in Panama, Dominican Republic and Uruguay to support them in evaluating national policy initiatives.

V. The Evaluation Office programme of work in 2018

73. The Evaluation Office will continue in 2018 its work in the following four key results areas.

A. Corporate evaluations

74. As detailed in the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan, 2018-2021, the Evaluation Office will manage seven corporate evaluations. Three evaluation were begun in 2017; these will be finalized in 2018: (a) Midterm evaluation of the UNFPA supplies programme; (b) Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis; (c) Meta-analysis of the engagement of UNFPA in highly vulnerable contexts. Four corporate evaluations will be initiated in 2018, to be completed in 2019: (a) Evaluation of UNFPA capacity to respond to humanitarian crisis; (b) Evaluation of results-based management approaches; (c) joint evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change (Phases I and II); and (d) [as a member of IAHE] a system-wide inter-agency humanitarian evaluation.

B. Decentralized evaluation system

75. As detailed in the quadrennial budgeted evaluation plan 2018-2021, country and regional offices have planned 14 country programme evaluations and 3 regional programme evaluations for 2018. To support implementation, quality assurance and use of these evaluations, the Evaluation Office will continue to strengthen the decentralized evaluation system through: (a) an update of the handbook on country programme evaluation, along with the development of accompanying e-learning; (b) delivery of technical support; (c) evaluation capacity development initiatives; and (d) quality assurance and assessment mechanisms. In addition, it will maintain the roster of evaluation consultants and the knowledge management system.

C. Enhancing coherence in the United Nations system evaluation functions

76. The Evaluation Office will continue to be an active participant in UNEG, IAHE, the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and other system-wide evaluation initiatives. It will continue to co-lead or take part in UNEG taskforces on the professionalization of evaluation, the decentralized evaluation function, gender and human rights, and on humanitarian issues. The Office will also continue working with IAHE and seek membership to the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, a global network whose members are Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and academic institutions.

D. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development

77. The Evaluation Office will continue its engagement in multi-stakeholder partnerships for national evaluation capacity development, including with EvalPartners, EvalYouth and Evalgender+.

E. Budget for the 2018 work plan

78. As of February 2018, the total budget of the Evaluation Office for 2018 was $4,381,719. The budget comprises two funding categories: (a) institutional budget ($2,981,181) and (b) non-core resources ($1,400,538).